

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-11

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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8164
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
USINT BAGHDAD
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
SECDEF WASHDC
DIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 DAMASCUS 3017

E.O. 11652: XGDS4
TAGS: PINT, SY, PINR
SUBJECT: SECTARIAN MURDERS CAUSING ALAWITES TO CIRCLE THE WAGONS

SUMMARY: ALAWITE BUSINESSMEN IN ASSESSING MOOD OF ALAWITE
COMMUNITY CLAIMS THAT POLITICALLY-MOTIVATED MURDERS OF
ALAWITE AND CLUMSY REGIME REACTIONS TO THEM ARE RAISING
SECTARIAN TENSIONS AND INCREASINGLY TYING THE FATE OF EVEN
ANTI-ASSAD ALAWITES TO THE SURVIVAL OF THIS REGIME. HE
SAYS THAT MANY ALAWITES HAVE NOT BEEN HAPPY WITH THEIR
HIGH PROFILE BUT HAVE COME TO FEAR A VIOLENT SUNNI REACTION
IF THIS REGIME IS TOPPLED. HE SUGGESTS THAT THE CLUMSY
AND SOMETIMES BRUTAL ACTS OF THE SECURITY APPARATUS IN
THEIR HUNT FOR THE KILLERS, WHETHER INADVERTENTLY OR BY
DESIGN, ARE PLAYING INTO THE HANDS OF NON-ALAWITE REGIME
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OPPONENTS. HIS VIEWS MAY NOT EVEN REFLECT THE PREVAILING
OPINION OF HIS TRIBE OR CLASS, BUT THEY DO INDICATE THAT
SOME WELL-EDUCATED ALAWITES, WHO ARE CRITICAL OF ASSAD'S
INNER CIRCLE AND THEIR POLICIES, ARE DISCOMFITED AND FEEL
THEMSELVES VULNERABLE TO BOTH THE REGIME AND ITS OPPONENTS.
END SUMMARY.

1. POLOFF IN LONG CONVERSATION WITH AN ALAWITE BUSINESSMAN, WHO IS ALONG-TIME CRITIC OF THE ASSAD REGIME, WAS GIVEN THE FOLLOWING ANALYSIS OF THE AFFECT THE WAVE OF ALAWITE MURDERS IS HAVING ON THIS MINORITY COMMUNITY.

2. HE WAS PARTICULARLY CRITICAL OF ASSAD FOR SURROUNDING HIMSELF WITH SYNCOPHANTS WHO DID NOT DARE TO QUESTION THE WISDOM OF THE PRESIDENT'S DIRECTIVES. MOREOVER, MANY OF THESE MEN WERE POORLY EDUCATED AND CARRIED OUT THE PRESIDENT'S ORDERS IN A MANNER THAT HARMED THE PRESIDENT'S IMAGE AND POPULARITY. THE CURRENT WAVE OF ARRESTS IN A SEARCH FOR THE CRIMINALS WHO WERE GUNNING DOWNALAWITES WAS A GOOD CASE IN POINT. IF THESE MEN WERE WELL-TRAINED, THEY WOULD NOT NEED TO MAKE MASS ARRESTS AND TO CONDUCT INTERROGATIONS UTILIZING FORCE WHICH ALIENATED RELATIVES AND FRIENDS OF THOSE ARRESTED.

3. HE REMINDED POLOFF THAT ASSAD CAME FROM A SMALL ALAWITE TRIBE CALLED THE KALABNI AND NOT FROM ONE OF THE MAJOR THREE TRIBES WHICH INCLUDED THE KHAYYATUUN, THE HADDADUUN, AND THE RASLANA. ASSAD'S METHODS DID NOT ENJOY THE FULL SUPPORT OF THE ALAWITE COMMUNITY BUT SECTARIAN KILLINGS WERE INCREASINGLY TYING THE FATE OF THE ALAWITES TO THIS REGIME. THE ALAWITES, HE CLAIMED, ORIGINALLY CAME TO POWER ALMOST BY ACCIDENT. THEY RESENTED THE DISCRIMINATION THEY HAD SUFFERED AND IN THE TIME TESTED WAY OF ALL PERSECUTED

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MINORITIES SOUGHT SOMETHING THAT THE RULERS COULD NOT TAKE AWAY--EDUCATION. THIS PROPELLED THEM INTO THE OFFICER CORPS AND THE PROFESSIONS, BUT THE ASSASSINATED GENERAL UMRAN AND OTHERS AMONG HIS FELLOW KHAYYATUUN NEVER ENVISIONED THAT THE ALAWITE COMMUNITY WOULD BECOME SO EXPOSED.

4. NOW, THE MURDERS OF ALAWITES WERE FOCUSING ATTENTION ON THE COMMUNITY AND RAISING SECTARIAN TENSIONS AND DISTRUST THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY. HE CLAIMED THAT SINCE GENERAL UMRAN'S MURDER IN 1969, TWELVE MEMBERS OF HIS TRIBLE HAD DIED IN POLITICALLY-MOTIVATED MURDERS--MOST OF THEM RECENTLY. HE DID NOT FEAR THE EDUCATED SUNNIS. SOME HAD EVEN TOLD HIM PRIVATELY THAT IF AN ANTI-ALAWITE REGIME EVER TOOK POWER, THEY WOULD PROTECT HIM. HOWEVER, HE FEARED THAT UNEDUCATED SUNNI FANATICS IN THE COUNTRY WOULD SOME DAY GO ON A RAMPAGEAGAINST THE ALAWITES LIVING OUTSIDE THEIR COASTAL MOUNTAIN DISTRICTS. HE POINTEDLY NOTED THAT HE HAD TRANSFERRED MUCH OF HIS BUSINESS INTERESTS OUTSIDE THE COUNTRY.

5. BOTH THE MURDERS AND THE INVESTIGATIONS WERE MAKING IT DIFFICULT FOR ALAWITE OPPONENTS OF THIS REGIME'S METHODS TO MAKE THEIR CASE. AS THE INCIDENCE OF MURDER AND HEAVY-HANDED,

BUT INEFFECTIVE, REGIME REACTION ROSE, THE WELFARE OF THE ALAWITE COMMUNITY BECAME TIED, OFTEN AGAINST THEIR WILL, TO THE WELFARE OF THE REGIME. WHOEVER WAS COMMITTING THOSE ACTS MUST REALIZE THIS. IN REFERRING TO THE RECENT KILLING OF A SUNNI SHEIKH FROM HAMA AT THE HANDS OF SYRIAN INTELLIGENCE, HE EVEN SUGGESTED THAT THOSE WHO WERE RESPONSIBLE MUST KNOW THAT THEY WERE ABETTING THE MURDERERS OF ALAWITES. HE CLAIMED THAT NAJI JAMIL HAD, NOT TOO LONG BEFORE HIS DISMISSAL, KICKED A MAN TO DEATH IN HIS CELL. HE FELT THAT JAMIL DELIBERATELY MAY HAVE BEEN SO BRUTAL IN ORDER TO HURT THE REGIME. HE WENT SO FAR AS TO SUGGEST THAT IT WAS NOT BEYOND TOTAL REASON TO BELIEVE THAT THE REGIME ITSELF WAS BEHIND SOME OF THE KILLINGS. WHEN TOLD THAT THIS WAS RIDICULOUS IN VIEW OF FACT MANY OF THOSE SLAIN WERE PRESIDENT'S RELATIVES, HE
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RESPONDED THAT SOME OF THEM WERE CRITICS OF THE PRESIDENT DESPITE THEIR FAMILIAL TIES.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 DAMASCUS 03017

6. IN COINCIDENTAL COMMENT TO CHARGE MAY 24, SYRIA'S UN PERMREP SHOEFI SAID ALAWITES WERE BECOMING INCREASINGLY NERVOUS ABOUT REGIME'S TACTICS IN HANDLING INVESTIGATION OF MURDERS. SHOEFI SAID THAT A LEADING ALAWITE IN THE FOREIGN MINISTRY, FORMER ARMY OFFICER ALI MUSTAPHA, WHO IS MINISTRY'S DIRECTOR OF ADMINISTRATIVE AFFAIRS, HAD COMPLAINED TO HIM THAT GOVERNMENT HANDLING OF THIS MATTER WAS CREATING LONG TERM DANGER FOR ALL ALAWITES. CONTRARY TO RIF'AT AL-ASSAD WHO WOULD LIKE NOTHING BETTER THAN BEING WARLORD OF AN ALAWITE MINI-STATE IN NORTHERN SYRIA, MUSTAPHA SAID, MOST ALAWITES REALIZED THAT THEIR FATE WAS FIRMLY TIED TO MAINTAINING GOOD RELATIONS WITH SYRIA'S SUNNI MAJORITY.

7. COMMENT: THE BUSINESSMAN IS A LONG-TIME CRITIC OF THE
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REGIME AND MAY NOT ACCURATELY REFLECT EVEN THE SENTIMENT OF HIS CLASS OR TRIBE. HE WAS NOT SERIOUS IN SUGGESTING THAT THE REGIME ITSELF MIGHT CONSCIOUSLY BEAR RESPONSIBILITY FOR THESE MURDERS. NEVERTHELESS, HIS DISCOMFITURE AT FINDING HIS FATE POTENTIALLY LINKED TO ASSAD'S IS REAL AND PROBABLY SHARED BY A NUMBER OF THE ALAWITE UPPER CLASS, MANY OF WHOM HAVE NEVER BEEN HAPPY WITH THE HIGH PROFILE OF ALAWITE IN THIS REGIME. THEY SEE DANGER IN THE SECURITY APPARATUS' INEPT AND ARROGANT CONDUCT WHICH PASSES FOR INVESTIGATIVE METHOD AND REALIZE THAT, REGARDLESS, OF THE MOTIVES, THE OVERALL EFFECT CAN ONLY BE TO EXACERBATE ANTI-ALAWITE FEELING AMONG THE SUNNI MAJORITY. OTHER SOURCES HAVE SUGGESTED TO US THAT THESE KILLINGS ARE HAVING A CHILLING AFFECT ON MANY PROMINENT ALAWITES, WHO ARE NOW LESS INCLINED TO ACCEPT SOCIAL INVITATIONS, REFLECTING CONCERN FOR THEIR PHYSICAL SAFETY.
PELLETREAU

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